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My name is Don Samuels. I am running for Congress in Minnesota's Fifth District; and I would be honored to have your vote in the Democratic Primary on August 9th.

You hear this all the time— "This is the most important election we've ever had." Let me tell you... This one is. I believe this election is about the future. We have the power to create this future with our voices and with our votes. When you vote on August 9th, I ask you to vote for the future you want to see become real. This is mine:

I envision a future where queer youth are protected from barbaric conversion therapy. I will ensure that no federal dollars go to organizations that promote the disproven practice of conversion therapy so that no young person grows up with the trauma caused by charlatans peddling bigotry disguised as science.

I envision a future where queer youth are protected from all forms of discrimination. I will ensure that no federal dollars go to organizations that discriminate against trans athletes who only want to compete in the sport they love while honoring their authentic identities. I will also ensure that no federal dollars go to organizations that infringe on the rights of parents to make their own medical choices regarding the transition of one of their family members.

I envision a future where LGBTQIA people can go out in public free from fear of violence. Just last month we saw the foiling of a terrorist attack at a Pride festival in Idaho—where 31 armed men, fueled by hate, planned to kill innocent people simply because of their sexual orientation or who they choose to love.

I envision a future where safety and justice are afforded to every member of the LGBTQIA community. We must hold rogue police accountable while also ensuring we have enough police to keep all citizens safe from community violence. We can do this by partnering with our state and local governments and by making the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act law.

I envision a future where weapons of war are not found in our neighborhoods. Assault-style rifles used to murder innocent people in schools, stores, and gathering places have no place in our society. No one should be able to buy a gun before they can buy a drink.

I envision a future where a person's employment cannot be threatened because of who they are or whom they love. We can do this by making the Equality Act federal law.

I envision a future where the right to marry the person you love is guaranteed not by the whim of Supreme Court justices, but by federal law. As we recently learned with the disastrous overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, we cannot rely on the courts to protect our hard-won rights. It is more important than ever that we fortify the rights we value so dearly—the right to love whom we choose and to marry whom we love—with law and not with court rulings.

I am running for Congress because I see this future clearly. If you believe in this future as well, vote for me on August 9th in the Democratic Primary for Minnesota's Fifth District.

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Members of the Minnesota Ice Swim Club.
Photo by Mike Hnida

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The Promise of Minnesota

BY RANDY STERN

On August 31, 2004, I arrived at the former Amtrak Station in St. Paul to become a Minnesotan. This, after years of being a native Californian, a Northern Virginian, and a Wisconsinite.

Since then, I fell in love with this state. I was happy to switch everything over to a Minnesota driver's license, a new bank, and a new mobile phone service…to name a few changes. I even found employment within a week of my arrival.

The latter part was the primary reason for moving to this state. In 2004, the economy in this state offered steady employment and a decent wage at a decent cost of living. In Minnesota, I was able to reset my career and, eventually, become part of this state's media corps.

In my 18 years of living here, I began to not only thrive, but create opportunities to truly enjoy what this state has to offer. Not just within the I-494/I-694 loop – but, beyond it.

I found a state worth discovering every chance I get to.

So, yes, we get some interesting climate and weather patterns that would make anyone shirk and complain about. It's too cold in the winter. It's too hot in the summer. You trade snow for mosquitoes and road construction.

But I'm not complaining. Not a bit. In fact, I truly love it here!

Why? If you lived in the places where I roamed from childhood, then you get a sense of every environment you experienced. The Twin Cities itself reminds me of parts of both Southern and Northern California, the DC Metro Area, and Madison. That sense of familiarity helped to ease my transition here early on.

With every place, Minnesota is not perfect. There are places where I had to turn around and walk (or drive) away from. There are places that do not welcome us, even if we do not wear any LGBTQ affirming items on us – or, on our vehicle.

That is not going to ruin our Summer in Minnesota, right?

This issue focuses on life in our great state. We have a few things to do for you to explore.

We are featuring the Minnesota Ice Swim Club on our cover in this issue. If you love swimming – really competitive swimming – this is something to check out.

How about doing more than just looking at the plants and flowers at the Minnesota Arboretum in Chanhassen? You can bicycle through the property, then stop and smell the flowers along the way.

The art festivals are back at Loring Park and Powderhorn Park! They're always a great time taking in our creative outputs outdoors!

Add some new music to your playlists, as we feature LGBTQ artists Nina Luna and Shod Santiago.

One final note, *Lavender* Magazine participates in PFund's Scholar Program by offering our Scholarship Award for Illustration. This year's recipient is Barrett Weems, a student at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. He is pursuing in an Illustration Degree with a supplementary interest in Comic Art.

We will be doing a profile on Weems later this year. For now, congratulations on receiving our scholarship from PFund!

That, in itself, is the promise of Minnesota! ∎

Jane Austen 2022: Screwball Comedy Meets Regency Wry

BY E.B. BOATNER

After an elephantine gestation period, *Emma* burst forth in rapturous, full-bore, post- partum-elation on the Guthrie's Wurtle Full-Thrust Stage. Scheduled to debut in 2020, the play was just shy of its first preview when Covid-19 darkened the Guthrie–and the nation's–stages. Yet *Emma* persevered.

Playwright Kate Hamill, known "radical adapter," let her imagination run on a long leash with this screwball-comedy take on Regency doyenne Jane Austen's 1815 novel. (In fact, a close reading of Austen's oeuvre will reveal an already existing fierce sense of satire. Respectable ladies of the early 19th century ran perforce on shorter leashes many might have preferred.) If you're only familiar with *Sense and Sensibility* or *Pride and Prejudice*, curl up with a copy of *Emma* and discover that Hamill's take, while amplified, is not far off the mark.

"I like to look at classics through a new-play lens," Hamill told the Guthrie's Editor Johanna Buch in a March 12, 2020, interview. Without adding something "unexpected, timely and interesting" to an adaptation, she added, she would just be creating a "pale, copy-and-paste imitation of the original…I think it's illuminating to create new work that expands and explores a classic story."

And that she has done. Emma is as maddening a 22-year-old as she was in the novel with her dedication to pulling the motes out of others' eyes while ignoring the beams in her own. Her hypochondriac father was as leech-clingy in the bound version–hard to increase on his paens to gruel as they flowed from Austen's acid-tipped pen.

Sometimes it's difficult to think of an earlier author seeing a modern work based on their words…sometimes not; Roman playwright Plautus might well have enjoyed an evening out on Broadway catching *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and I'd bet Jane Austen might just enjoy seeing her characters satirized to a greater degree today. She may have wished at the time that society gave her more occasion to open the throttle. Added to Hamill's bubbly mix is the fact that the cast stayed in touch and intact for 2 1/2 years to finally able to perform as a team, intact as planned.

While the peripheral frenetic action occasionally obscures some central plot activity, the opening night audience was giddy with pleasure, applauding individual speeches and uniformly bowled over by the loose-jointed flailings and swoonings of insecure Harriet Smith (Samantha Steinmetz), for whom Emma (Amelia Pedlow) is determined to find a match. Pedlow herself is extraordinary, onstage in every scene, vitality, volubility, and will unflagging.

Mrs. Weston, Emma's former governess and her first matchmaking success, now married and imminently expecting, rounds on George Knightly, Emma's childhood friend, when he criticizes Emma's lack of occupation. She brings down the house asking him what exactly an intelligent young woman like Emma is supposed to do when she's not allowed to work and has no outlet for her energies? The answer, obviously, is to stir up trouble for herself and others.

Director Hamill also has no problem in breaching the fourth wall, and characters chide the audience–Emma for its hiding information from her, for one.

Dress up or down as you will, the theater is delightfully cool, but you'd best slip on your trainers and lace them tight to keep up with Emma & Co.

Emma will run through August 21. ∎

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Alma Welcomes Spring

BY CARLA WALDEMAR

Restaurant Alma's menu changes with the seasons….but that's about all that does. For over 20 years in its storefront location near the U of M campus, it's won devotees (not to mention many a James Beard Award nomination) for consistently offering a low-key but highly rewarding dining experience based on popping-fresh local ingredients woven into a four-course prix fixe menu. Those four courses subdivide into multiple dishes per course, making the final $85 tab an unsung bargain in the fine-dining sphere.

Alma's setting invites diners to relax. Blond brick walls rise from the concrete floor to a high ceiling from which light bulbs dangle within lacy, wire cages. Votive candles flicker a simple welcome from their stance on simple butcher block tabletops, soon to be covered with a welcome offering of toasted almond, subtly spiced with anise and pimento, accompanying a handful of dark and meaty olives, whose pungency is leavened with snips of orange zest and hints of thyme.

They lead off the kitchen's new spring menu. Homemade sourdough and focaccia slices, paired with Hope butter, soon appear, joined by antipasti that lead off with a triangle of goats'-milk cheese, whose mildly assertive flavor is balanced by sweet-tart shreds of honeyed apricots. On another plate, a house-made cracker, smaller than a Triscuit, supports a juicy nugget of pheasant rillette, punched up (literally: it's underneath the meat) by a welcome jolt of harissa.

Yummy, all. But the best of the starters is a petite, warm and ultra-creamy, mushroom flan, topped by a wrinkly morel and a pair of translucent, paper-thin potato chips. I could eat about twelve portions, it's so satisfying.

But on to the official first course—a pair of veggie compositions. First, a toss of mixed greens, fava beans and radish rounds topped with flame-blistered snap peas—spring on a salad plate. Next, a phyllo-based tart topped with a robustly vegetal-tasting puree of nettles and spinach, upon which rested a wisp of prosciutto-like ham royal—along with (supposedly) pecorino, but the cheese's taste gets down-played in the shuffle.

In service paced to suit each diner's fancy, next arrived the two-item main course. A fillet of gently-cooked trout—sweet and moist—was rendered even tastier by a topknot of king crab tendrils, plus an accompanying lemon-herb butter sauce, in which lazed a sprinkling of tiny sweet peas. Perfection.

At the same moment, however, a roasted New York strip arrived—slender, medium-rare, and piqued with a tad too much salt for my taste. The plate was garnished with al dente asparagus spears, a bright dab of rhubarb sauce (two more signs of spring) and a creamy pour of sweet-onion soubise to sauce the meat. A saucer held a domino-size square of Yukon Gold potato pave (sort of like scalloped), ultra-rich (and that's just fine), accompanied by a bit of spring ramps and salsa verde.

My advice to the kitchen, however: No, No—don't bring out the fish and meat together. Allow each to star as a separate course, to be enjoyed at leisure without letting plate number two stand around getting cold.

For dessert, a petite serving of a fluffy buckwheat chiffon cake appeared, joined by macerated strawberries, candied slivered almonds, and a brown-sugar anglaise sauce—modestly interesting, if not spectacu-

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lar. I sipped the last of my sorghum Old Fashioned, chosen from a five-item specialty cocktail list that includes the Lavender Gimlet occupying many an adjoining table. Wines BTG $8-25; low-and no-proof cocktails and beer, too. Alma is another no-tipping operation, preferring to add the now-common 21-percent wellness surcharge.

Accomplished, friendly servers contribute to the pleasure of dining here, where area neighbors walked in sporting everything from sneakers to stilettos, all in search of a fresh and well-conceived menu, adeptly served in a pleasant setting. No disappointments there. Open Thursday-Sunday 5-8 PM. ∎

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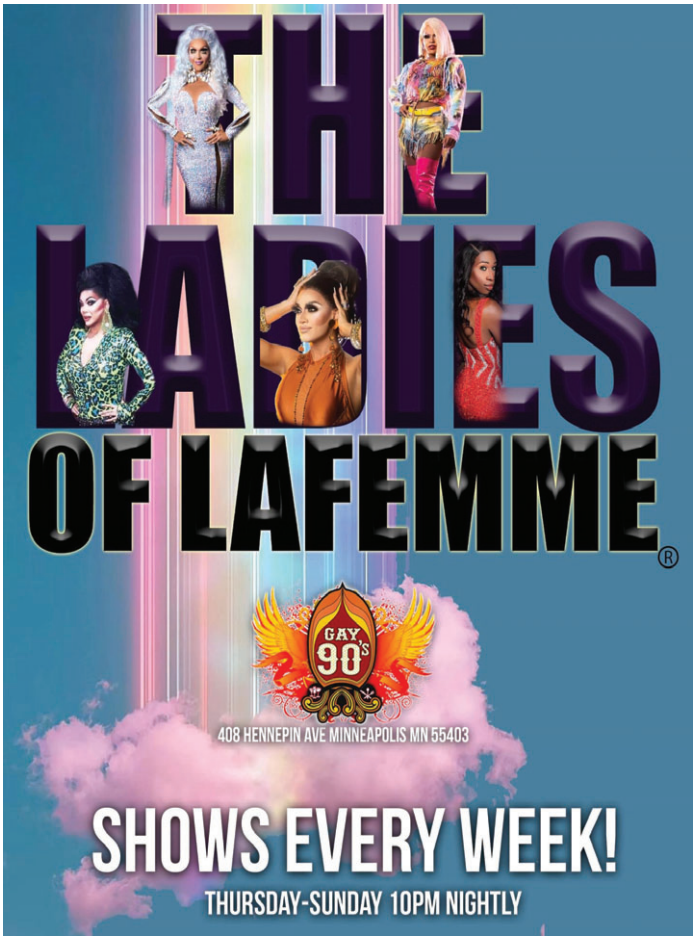

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Making a Splash: Minnesota Ice Swim Club

BY ISAAC JOHNSON | PHOTOS BY MIKE HNIDA

"Persistence pays," says Josh Tomashek, one of the coaches of the Minnesota Ice Swim Club. He and his fellow coach Luke Paquin have recently breathed new life into the LGBTQ focued sports team and are ready to take it for another lap. Tomashek says, "a lot of the gains that are made in swimming really take continuous longitudinal effort in the pool." Just like its sport, the Minnesota Ice Swim Club, and the benefits it provides for its community, continues to cash in on its efforts to endure.

The original swim club was organized in the early 90's as the Minnesota Rainbow Trout and had their first internationally debut at the 1994 Gay Games. By the late 90's the team was renamed Minnesota Ice but experienced a significant ebb and flow in membership and

competition participation after that. There were times when membership was extremely low. There was one member however, Brian Jacobson who persisted and kept the team alive until 2019 when Paquin and Tomashek stepped in.

They reached out to Brain and shared with him their desire to re-formalized the team, to bring back the community. "We asked if we could continue on with the name as a homage to the people who came before us, who laid the groundwork for this legacy of queer swimming in Minnesota," says Paquin.

Shortly thereafter, the pandemic pulled the plug on their momentum, but if the last 30 years are any indication, it was going to stop them. As they celebrate their third anniversary since reorganizing they have more members than ever before. "We've grown our team to be really welcoming and inclusive of everyone," says Paquin, " It's not just a queer swim team, it's a team for our supporters, we have a fair amount of allies on our team. It's a nice way to build community within the LGBTQ community at large and it's a great way to interact and meet people from around the world."

The team's member's span a wide range of ages, sexualities, and backgrounds. This is primarily in part to Paquin and Tomashek's

efforts to make team membership accessible for underrepresented groups. Tomashek says, "One of the things that we did from the beginning was pricing our membership far below other United States Masters Swimming (USMS) teams in our region. Last year we also started offering discounted memberships for trans-identifying and BIPOC folks." Minnesota Ice also consciously budgets for a built-in assistance fund for their members who are struggling to afford being on the team or struggling with the expense of attending swim meets.

Folks join the team for different reasons. Some come to improve their times from precious swimming experience, others are drawn because they are training for a triathlon. Most join because they want to be a part of a supportive and community oriented environment. "We do our best to try to figure out each swimmer's goal and encourage them toward what they want to get out of the team," says Tomashek. ∎

The MN Arboretum: A Year-Round Natural Wonderland

BY CONLAN CARTER | PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MINNESOTA ARBORETUM

Boasting a whopping 1200 acres of curated landscapes, bike trails, gardens, classes, art and history exhibits, and more, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum is a must-see for tourists and Twin Cities locals alike to make the perfect summer outing for everyone.

Lavender sat down with Sarah Jackson, the Media Specialist for the Arboretum (or "the Arb," as it's referred to often), and it was quickly apparent that there is a lot going on at the Arb year-round. With an annual visitor list of just under 400,000 (in 2021), the Arb is a unique intersection of education and novel recreation, combining the University of Minnesota's commitment to research and stewardship of local plant and wildlife with a focus toward community engagement.

But what might immediately catch the eye are the gardens at the Arb–as of last year, there were 28, not including the various educational models, like green roofs, indigenous weed exhibits (for amateur gardeners nervous about identifying suspicious garden invaders)–alongside glamorous herb gardens and hedge displays are the sheer number of seasonal flowers in bloom at the Arb. Visitors who made it to the Arb in the Spring were witness to a breathtaking 40,000 tulips, but summer Arb-goers won't be missing out. "There's just always something blooming," Jackson mentions amid a list of seasonal favorites, "Roses bloom all summer. The Perennial Garden, the Annual Garden is in bloom . . ." Other notable mentions (that you may not get in your local garden) are a Maze Garden, a Sensory Garden (a vibrant accessibility-focused installation on the human sensory experience), a Sculpture Garden, and an Ornamental Grass Collection.

The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum hosts a massive variety of nature-focused classes for all ages and for different levels of engagement. Guided nature walks and tours come highly recommended, and aspiring nature photographers can learn how to shoot plantlife from their iPhone. "We get a lot of interest in photography," Jackson explains, "because if you're a fan of flora and fauna and insects, you're typically running around with your iPhone. And so we have iPhone photography classes,

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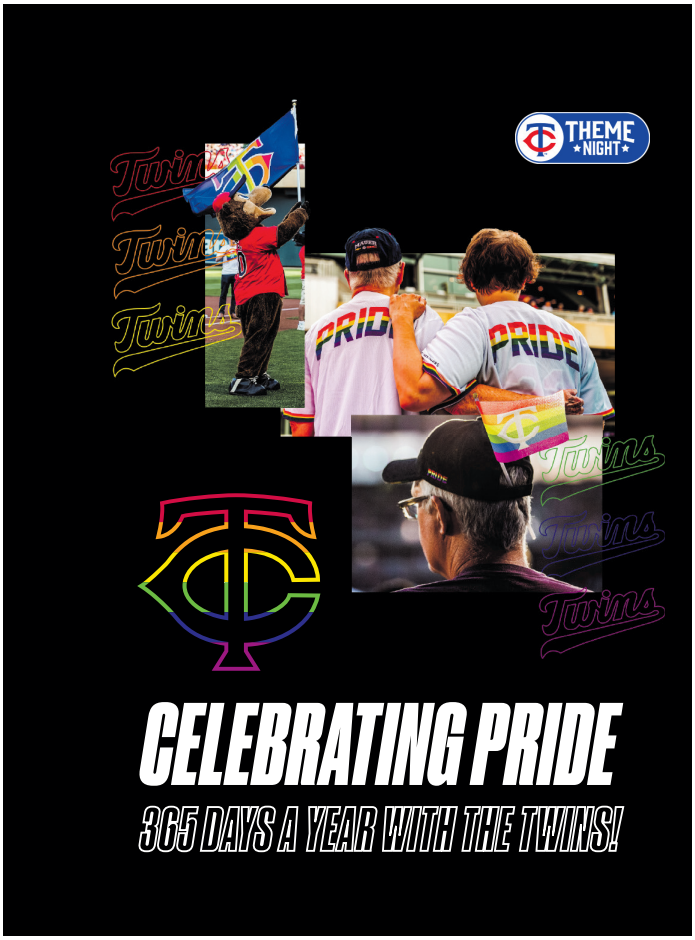

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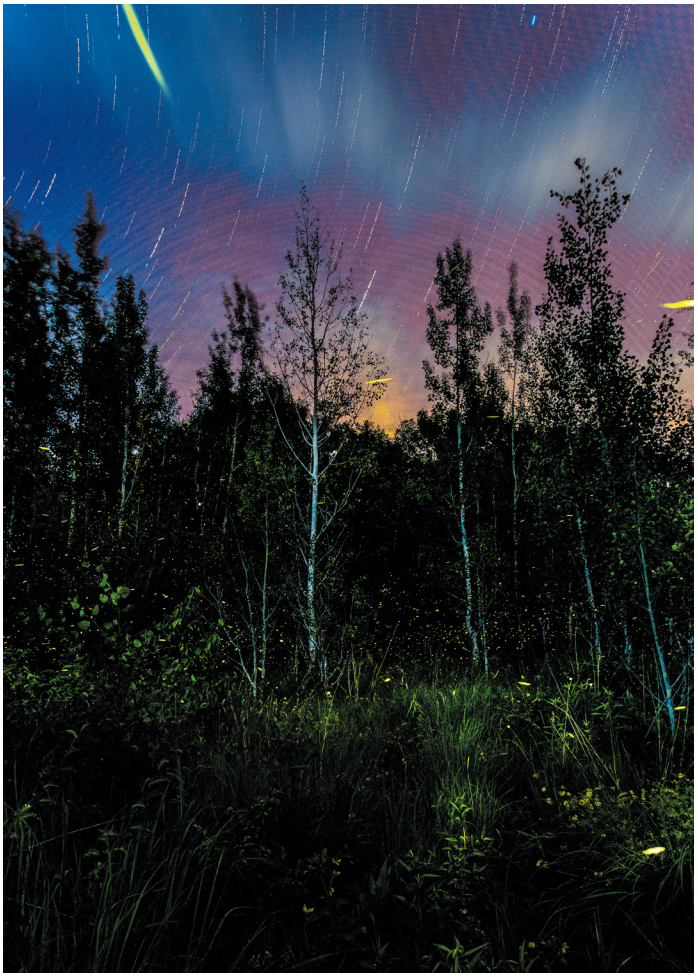


and we have real camera photography classes." Gardening enthusiasts have their pick from a host of gardening and horticulture classes, including some webinar options for folks who can't make it out.

Families with children also have ample opportunity to combine playtime with enriching education. Jackson highly recommends the Green Bean Family Garden Time, a two-hour course themed on seasonal subject matter (e.g. "Flower Extravaganza" or "All About Veggies"): "You go as a family to learn where food comes from." For kids raised in the post-internet era, getting a special front-row seat to a honey bee hive inspection while learning about how the 400+ types of Minnesota bees play a crucial role in producing the food you find at home.

And it wouldn't be a proper Minnesota park if there wasn't ample opportunity to bike. With recent additions, the Arb now connects over 100 miles of regional bike trails. Want to arrive by bike? We recommend the Highway 5 Regional Trail. "It's this gorgeous boardwalk that grows across the wetland–the connector trail is super cool," Jackson notes. Coming up soon is the annual Bike the Arb event (Sunday, July 17th), featuring a 13K road race, a bike safety camp and bike parade for kids, and even a geocache course along the Three-Mile Drive.

For those of us more accustomed to colder climates (we're looking at you, MN locals!) or for folks visiting in the peak of the summer heat, the Arb has plenty of indoor spaces to take a load off (like The Eatery, for breakfast or lunch). And for art and history lovers, the Arboretum boasts a horticultural and rare book library (with bespoke furniture created by architect and woodworker George Nakashima). Running through mid-August are two noteworthy exhibits–The Art of Flying: Bird Images from A to Z and Journey Through Japan: Traditional Woodblock Prints. "That doesn't exist anywhere else in the world. The [rare books and prints] barely exist anywhere in the world," Jackson points out, "it's completely one of a kind." Both exhibits feature centuries-old images taken from the library's rare collection and are enhanced with educational materials and references to gardens in the greater arboretum.

Looking ahead to the Fall–the Arboretum's busiest season–nature-lovers can expect to find other marvelous outdoor activities, like the AppleHouse, Scarecrows in the Garden, and a mesmerizing Glass Pumpkin Patch with over 4,000 hand-blown glass pumpkin sculptures.

Much like the Minnesota Zoo, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum is a ticketed entry, and it's recommended to make reservations for your preferred events and adult and family classes. For more information, visit www.arb.mn.edu . ▮

PRIDE GAME

VS

JULY 30 • 2 PM

Captain Morgan

POOLING AROUND
Splashy Men's Swim Styles for Spring and Summer

BY MIKEY ROX | PHOTO COURTESY OF BIGSTOCK/ARTOFPHOTO

Slap some style where the sun don't shine – if clothing is mandatory, that is – in our broad spectrum swim picks gunning for a dive in the deep end.

VAST ARTIST VOLLEY

Ready for a Donna summer? Legendary graphic artist CJ Dunn draws inspiration from the burnt-orange '70s on Vast's all-over logo-print volley shorts with max-comfort drawcord waistband for your work-in-progress beach bod. $40, vastlife.com

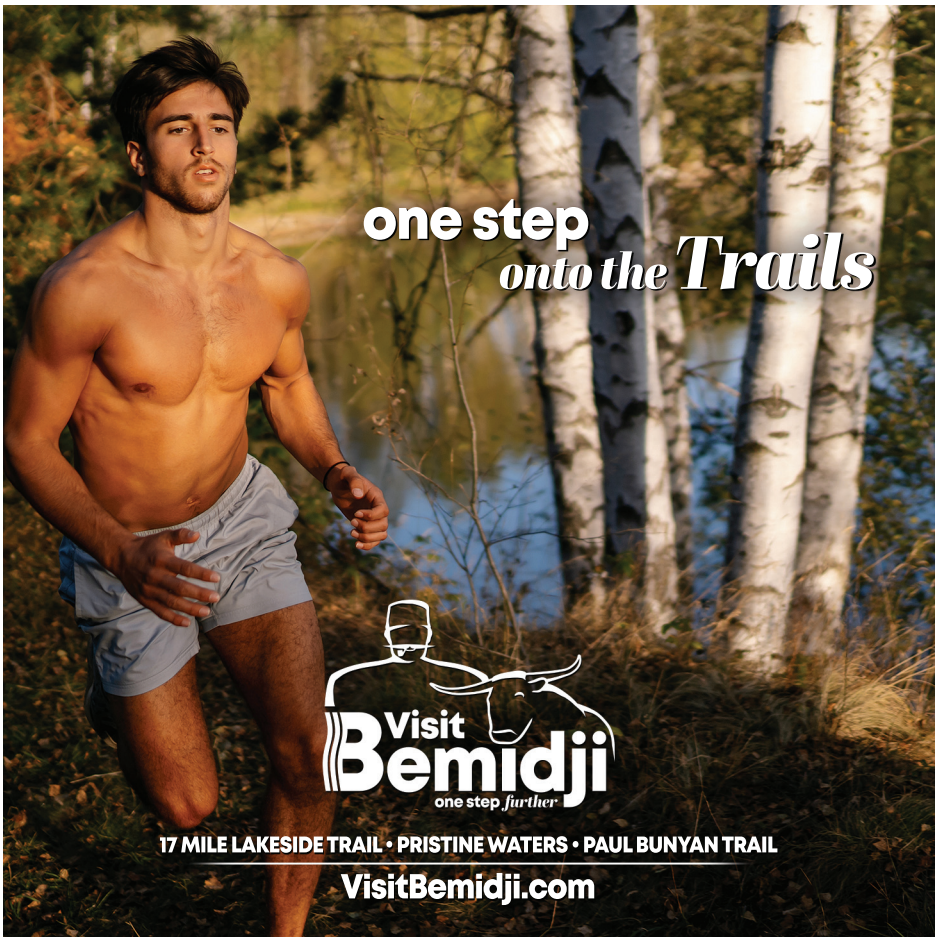
SLUGGERS COTTESLOE SUNSET BRIEFS

Gather the boys and breathe new life into Brooks & Dunn's "Neon Moon" with a synchronized swim of the TikTok trend in a group set of Sluggers' when-the-sun-goes-down budgie smugglers. $53, sluggers.com.au

INFAMOUS SWIM KHAKI KAOS

You don't have to be a capital-K Kardashian to get wet and wild in these leopard-print board shorts in a maskuline army-green colorway. $79, infamousswim.com

Continue on page 22



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DANDY DEL MAR BELIZE BRIEFS

Leave a little (but not too little) to the imagination in the California-born Belize swim briefs from Dandy Del Mar, designed for those seeking maximum leisure in minimum coverage. $79, dandydelmar.com

PHINEAS COLE 2022

Paired with a lightweight top and pool-side slides, Phineas Cole's 2022 collection – replete with ocean-going prints and patterns – transitions seamlessly from running errands to schmoozing at The Standard rooftop. $195, paulstuart.com

AUSSIEBUM BANANA PARTYON!

Fruit by the foot? Size queens can only hope that's what you're pack-in' in this self-referential banana hammock that's meta its match. $27, aussiebum.com

VAST TROPICAL ELEMENTS

Vast's street-style swimwear – like its five-inch Tropical Elements shorts with dual-sided pockets and two-way stretch – makes just as big a splash on a boat day as they do a backyard BBQ. $60, vastlife.com

HOMOCO RED BOTTLES

Don't wait 'til June to show your pride in HOMOCO's Power Bottoms, like its red lube-bottle logo trunks, themselves an homage to the depression-era Homes Oil Company, the gay founder's family business. $69, homoco.co

ASOS DAY SOCIAL

Reduce your carbon footprint in these mid-length, colorblocked man-about-towns (made from recycled plastic bottles and textile waste), ideal for all manner of outdoor activities, like cruising the bike trails or cruzing the boardwalks. $20, asos.com ▮

Mikey Rox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than 100 outlets across the world. Connect with Mikey on Instagram @mikeyroxtravels

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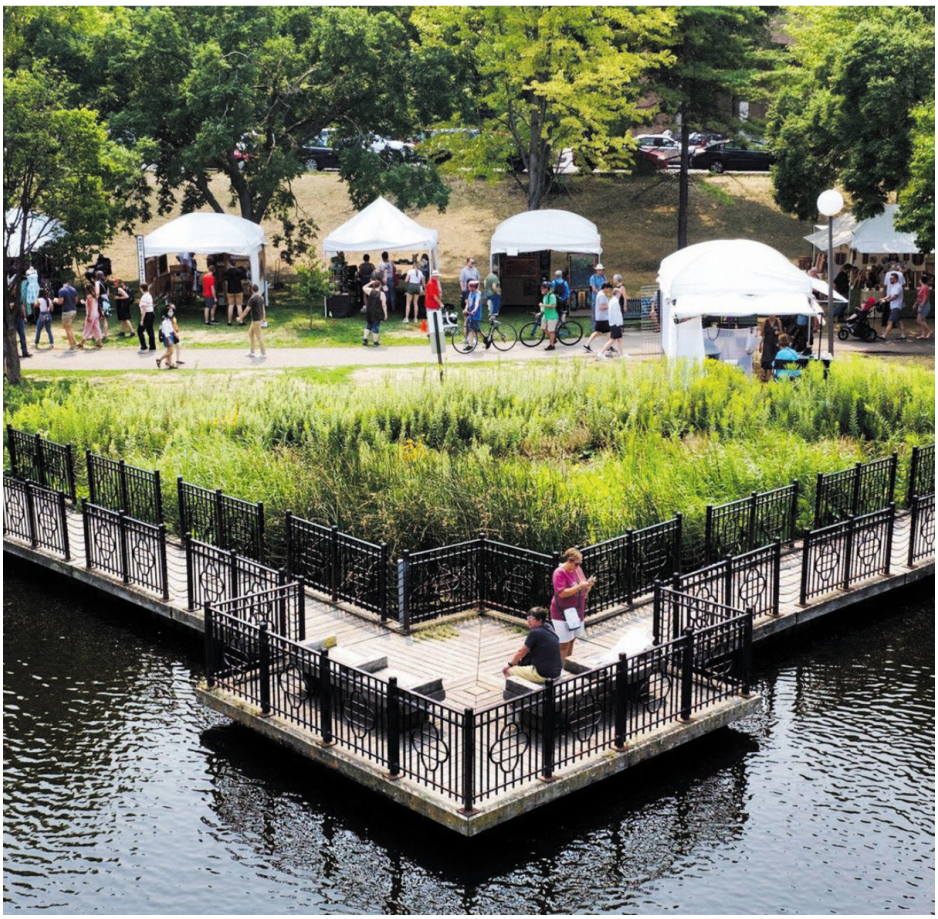
Beautify your July with a trip to the Loring Park Art Festival

BY ELISE MAREN | PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE LORING PARK ART FESTIVAL

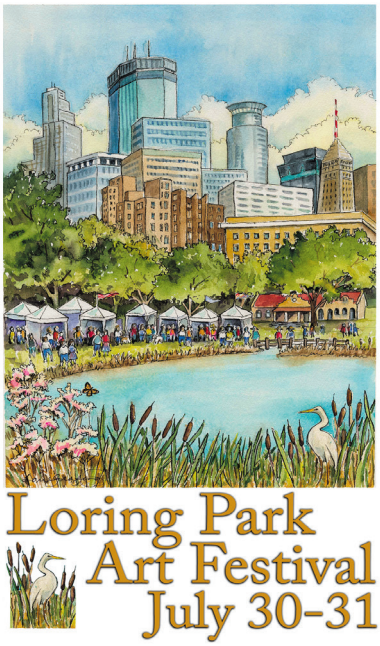
Mark your calendars for the weekend of July 30th-31st to savor the arts and our beloved Minneapolis parks at the Loring Park Art Festival. The festival has been a family-friendly and accessible Minneapolis tradition for over twenty years. With children's activities, diverse food options, scheduled stage performances, and wandering musicians, there truly will be something for everyone. The location is perfect for inclusion of all friends and family as there are several wheelchair-accessible transportation options, dogs are allowed on leashes, and there are quieter green spaces close by for anyone who might need to take a break from festivities. Art will be available at a wide range of prices to enable all art-lovers to find their own unique treasure. Quite impressive that a festival named by *Sunshine Artists Magazine* as one of the top 100 fine art festivals in the nation for the past 18 years can be found in our own backyard.



A variety of art forms will be presented by 140 different juried artists, more than 45 of which are new to the festival this year. You will find masterful examples of ceramics, drawings, paintings, textiles, glass, jewelry, metal, mixed media, sculpture, woodworking, photography, paper arts, scratchboard, and henna. The henna artisan, Reena Maheshwari, is of a mother-daughter duo who have been doing henna in the Twin Cities for over twenty years. "Last year's festival saw record numbers in both attendance and sales," said Pat Parnow, festival founder. "This year proves to build on that success. Artist applications for our 140 spaces totalled 370 and were especially compelling this year. Festival attendees will be able to explore the talents of newcomers and beloved favorites who have been with us for years." The festival has chosen some of these talented individuals to be featured artists on the event website, where one can also find a full list of artists, vendors, and activities.

Loring Park Art Festival began in 1999 when three artists devised a plan to combine their years of experience participating in other art events to create a festival designed for artists, by artists. Together, founders Pat Parnow, Carol Rahr Haubner, and Mary Ann Snedic Wunderlin have over 100 years of experience in exhibiting, consulting, and jurying numerous art festivals. They viewed Loring Park with its gorgeous ponds and dignified gardens as their "new canvas" for cultivating a community gathering to celebrate creative expression. The festival is currently produced by Artists for Artists LLP and managed by Pat Parnow and Cindy Jacobson.

On both days, the Aspiring Artists Micro



Music Festival will be held on the North Stage, which is the porch of a Victorian-era building! On both days, you'll find a group from the Westminster Presbyterian Church entertaining on the Main Park Building Stage. On Sunday the 31st, Urban Sketchers Twin Cities, a group who goes to various locations to draw their surroundings, will have a sketch-out. After the Micro Music

Festival ends on Sunday, the North Stage will host the Diversity Street Dancers at 1pm, followed by the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphony at 2pm, and the Minnesota Mandolin Orchestra at 3:15pm. A group of art instructors from Wine and Canvas will be present to inspire you to create your own masterpiece. Last but certainly not least, the culinary artisans providing food will include KCM Egg Rolls, Best Way (Greek food), Habanero Tacos, Top Pierogi, Taste the Real Nawlins, Paella Depot, Tibetan Family Momo, and more.

Other upcoming art fairs in the Twin Cities include the Powderhorn Art Fair (August 6th-7th) and the Uptown Art Fair (August 5th-7th). Like many art events, Loring Park Art Festival depends on volunteer support in order to run. Find more information about fun volunteer opportunities on the event website below. Regardless of your role, hope to see you there! ▮

Event detail summary:
Dates: Saturday, July 30th: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.; Sunday, July 31st: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Location: Loring Park at Oak Grove and Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis
Parking and directions: www.loringparkartfestival.com/getting-there
Find more information at www.loringparkartfestival.com

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Fiercely Independent: Nina Luna

BY ASHLEY BERNING | PHOTOS BY CARINA ALLEN / RLYBLONDE

Nina Luna is a Minnesota native who has been writing music since she was young. Her mom was a huge Bob Dylan fan and a recording artist herself, so when Nina got the opportunity to record some of the guitar-based tracks she'd written, she jumped at the chance. After high school, she attended college in NYC where, although she majored in European Studies, she taught herself how to record, mix, and produce her own songs. She's back in Minnesota for (most of) the summer and has been performing live shows to celebrate the release of her latest single, "Storms (Summer in Minnesota)," that dropped June 3, and her upcoming EP.

Nina's previous work is very folksy, soft singer-songwriter, with influences from Alicia Keys and Florence and the Machine. "I think one of the reasons why I've struggled to find my sound [is because] I've just explored a lot of different styles of music. I like a lot of different kinds of music. I listen to a lot of Bob Dylan and I love that kind of songwriting, and then on the other hand, I've always loved Christina Aguilera because I loved strong female vocalists who could just kill it. That was one of my favorite things to do when I was little: try do Christina Aguilera and Mariah Carey runs." Nina's refrains are extremely catchy and show off her range. Her song "Force of Nature," which came out in March of this year, has a bluesy beat and a hook that sticks with you.

Her sound on her latest work "is definitely a departure from the more singer-songwriter stuff that I've done recently, which I'm really excited about. It's dancy, it's a little bit rock and roll, it's definitely a lot more attitude… There's fully embracing all of myself, upbeat pop dance kind of thing, and also the side of me that's an introvert and introspective and thinking about my feelings and things." Although she is musically diverse, she knows exactly how she wants her music to sound, which is why she not only writes and plays her music, but records, mixes, and produces all of it herself. She also enjoys collaboration: the video for her latest single, "Storms (Summer in Minnesota)," was created by Kelly O'Donnell of Starseed Studios.

She spent ten years in NYC before coming

back to Minnesota to hone her sound, reconnect with nature, and hopefully collaborate with other local artists. "There's such a strong local music scene [in Minneapolis] and it's really just like a community. I've played shows here and there in Minneapolis, but I'm excited to get back to performing live in Minneapolis and intentionally setting up shows with other artists and just letting myself be part of that community. When it comes to my career I've been very independent, because I was trying to figure out what my sound was, and what my image was, and all of that. I was kind of protective of that, but I feel like I'm in a place now where it just sounds really fun to be part of a community, reach more fans that way, and collaborate more."

Her independent streak has helped her to focus on both music and introspection. Coming back to Minnesota in 2019 allowed her to hone her skills mixing and producing as well as spend some rejuvenating time in the Minnesota woods. "At the end of this most recent August, I went camping by myself for three nights. And I remember when I told people, they were like, 'You did what? What did you do that whole time?' I was like, 'I don't know, just sat in nature and loved it?' It was great." Being in nature, she says, is more difficult to do in NYC than here in Minnesota.

This summer, she's already played shows at 331 Club here in Minneapolis, Silverlake Lounge in Los Angeles, and with a full live band at Icehouse on July 1. There will be more shows coming this fall – one for sure in September again at 331 Club – so be sure to follow her on Twitter or check her website, thisisninaluna.com. Her music and videos can be found on YouTube and Spotify. Catch up on her discography now, so that when you see her on stage this fall, you can sing along. ▮

HIS ONLINE LINE
Shod Santiago Turns Digital Fame Into Fortune

BY TERRANCE GRIEP | PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHOD SANTIAGO

"I'm just here to get my coins and leave," Shod Santiago proclaims, and, sure, he's LMAO-ing as he proclaims it, but he's also describing his profession in all of its Protean forms. What Atlanta-based Shod Santiago is while getting those coins is hard to nail down. He's defined in his website's bio as an "online sensation"–you know the type: raconteur, endorser, influencer. Away from the world of screens and screeds, Shad Santiago might be called a social media personality, trading in that most ephemeral and ethereal of currencies, fame.

And not just any fame, that would be hard enough–Shad Santiago deals in fame in its most ephemeral and ethereal form, the modern stuff, the trickiest, wiggliest fame, the flame-like fame that comes in like a spark and often lasts as long as a spark, Internet Fame. Toward that end, Santiago has pursued employment in a gaggle of non-real jobs. Of course, he has his own take on his mercurial profession. "I describe it as being an all around artist," he clarifies. "I do it all–act, rap, perform, host, and provide commentary. The list goes on and on." Obviously, dismissing someone with such a pedigree as merely "famous for being famous" would be a mistake.

Shod Santiago began his coins-getting by posting on that great tangler of the attention-deprived, Vine. (In case you blinked between 2013 and 2019, Vine was a short-lived short-form video hosting service–an application, or "an app," as the wrinkle-free say–wherein users could share looping, seven-second long clips, often toward the laudable end of inspiring LOLZ in profusion.)

In these salad days, Santiago's brand came into sharper focus as a free-range original-flavored public persona that has since proven itself as friend-effacing as it is self-effacing, that has luxuriated in attention even while sharing it, that has valued fact and innuendo in equal measure, and that's gift-wrapped in a ribbon-

like laugh that's as capricious as it is contagious. "What sets me apart is I'm me!" Shad Santiago observes. And the man is not wrong, and profoundly so.

On Vine, the future influencer provided content both sublime and ridiculous, acquiring a viewership of over one million devoted Vinees…but he soon moved on, taking his devoted fan base with him. With them at his side, he has since delivered a more extended version of his energetic, girl-please charisma to VH1's *Love & Hip Hop Atlanta* and an independent TV series *Big, Beautiful Woman*.

He transmuted this experience into the talk format on Strong Voice Television's Shod Santiago Show. According an online profile, the program "brings a fresh outlook on late night talk shows. Shod delivers intriguing advice, and entertainment to a niche group of individuals." This niche, naturally enough, are consumers of social media presumably looking for a talk show to call #theirown.

A show biz career path that might resemble a frog jumping from lily pad to lily pad has given Santiago a wholly unique perspective on the meta-medium with which he's dealt since the beginning. "I think fame is being really well-known," Santiago observes. "Of course there are levels, but fame is fame, if that makes sense. So many people have so many different definitions, but to me, it's measured by your longevity and your ability to influence others."

Longevity might be the most crushing metric to maintain in a digital medium where too-long phrases are reduced to acronyms and

acronyms, still being too long, are replaced by emojis, but Santiago is equal to the challenge. "Honestly, for me, there is no pressure," he affirms. "I'm sure other people feel pressured. However, I believe everything happens the way it's supposed to."

When Santiago meets his fans, friends, or followers in the real world, they're often jarred by the difference between the personality living in their screens and the person standing in front of them. "The most common misunderstanding [about me] is probably that people think I'm sooo rowdy and cursing people out twenty-four/seven," Santiago laughs. "That's so not me. It's crazy that people even think that. I don't just randomly walk around cursing people out."

If he has to battle preconceptions when personally meeting admirers, Santiago can take solace in not encountering other kinds of prejudices…probably. "I honestly don't feel like I battle against any stereotypes." Santiago supposes. "I mean, I'm sure there are a lot of stereotypes, but I legit am, like, out of the loop–I don't pay attention to a lot of things!"

These come-to-Shad meetings can put Santiago into an appreciative state of mind. "Just having a fan base in general is a surprise for me," Santiago admits. "It's such a blessing that people love me simply for being me! Still to this day, I'm so grateful." He's getting his coin alright, but with uncounted fans demanding regular new content in multiple media, Shad Santiago doesn't appear to be leaving anytime soon.

This is just as well: Santiago hopes that his own success can serve as blueprint to the very fans whose existence embodies that success. "Anything you want to do in life, career-wise, is attainable," Shod Santiago insists. "If you can see it in your head and it's clear, it already happened–you just haven't gotten there yet."

Sharing success is for Shod Santiago a nearly-religious experience, and the more he shares the more he seems to get. "Pray and meditate and be good to people," he instructs. "If you believe it, like, truly believe it, it's already yours. Just keep your head up." ▮

https://www.instagram.com/shodsantiago/
shodsantiago@gmail.com

EPISODE 2

BY LAKEY BRIDGE

Let me tell you what sex is like for a post-menopausal woman: it ain't nothin' to write home about. Yes, it still feels nice, but it is no longer the motivating force in your life. You rarely give it a thought until you've somehow stumbled into bed with someone on your way to do something else.

"I used to be pretty good at this," I thought to myself earlier this week when I wandered into our bedroom to find that my spouse had lit candles, huskily ordered Alexa to play Barry White, and was perched naked on top of the covers.

"Get in here!" she demanded, telling me we had only a half-hour to get the sex done before my stepson returned home. So, that gave me less than an hour to:

1. Remember how to have sex (it had been several months).
2. Forget that we've been on the verge of divorce for over a year.
3. Erase from my rattled brain that just the day before she had screamed at me for a solid hour while driving like a lunatic around and around our block with the car windows down for all the neighbors to hear.

And I had to do all of this while ignoring the fact that she kept checking her phone to track the movements of my stepson as he creeped ever closer to our home.

Suffice it to say, I faked my orgasm. But it was still nice. Certainly nicer than getting screamed at for an hour.

When I entered peri-menopause in my late 40s, I was alarmed at my diminishing libido. Since early adulthood, my sex drive had been a constant companion. It was a scamp! Always there to distract me from boredom and lure me into any number of madcap misadventures. It was the driving force behind so many bad decisions, but I never held that against it.

I was born in the mid-1960s. I know you youngsters think of the '60s and early '70s as a time of freewheeling sex and love and merrily wallowing in the mud at Woodstock with a bunch of hippies. But what you forget is that Richard Nixon was elected president in 1968. Richard Nixon—not free love—was the America of my youth.

My parents weren't prudes. They were sophisticated. My mom wore Pucci cocktail pajamas and hosted fondue parties! And my dad—unlike a lot of the Neandertals of his generation—treated my mom as an equal partner.

Photo courtesy of Bigstock/Dani Hoz

Yet, when it came to their views on sex, they were both very much of their generation.

When I was in middle school, my mom found Judy Blume's racy book *Wifey* under my bed. This book had been passed around the lunchroom for months and it had finally fallen into my sweaty hands. When I arrived home from school, I was greeted by my mom, wielding a vodka tonic in one hand and *Wifey* in the other, screaming at me for my depravity. Thanks, mom, for creating the template that dictates I can only fall in love with women who scream at me.

(P.S. I later found *Wifey* on my mother's nightstand. She had wrapped it in the jacket of another book to hide that she was reading and—I'm certain—enjoying it.)

This shamed me into sexual hibernation until my early 20s when I realized I was gay and all hell broke loose.

Sex was a wonderful surprise! I was delighted that—for me—the act was never mired in guilt or shame despite my mother's best efforts.

Sex was fun! It created constant drama! It made me obsess over women who weren't very nice to me!

And, then, it was over.

As I entered menopause and my body began leaching hormones, sex became like a best friend who moves to Europe. After the initial grief, the intensity of your relationship fades. You think of it wistfully but almost never bother to pick up the phone to chat.

After sex stops dominating your thoughts, your mind becomes much less focused on the endless chasing of your youth and much more focused on grounding. Suddenly, I understood why so many middle-aged women take up gardening with such gusto. ∎

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(National Alliance on Mental Illness)
Providing free classes and peer support groups for people affected by mental illnesses.
800 Transfer Rd. #31
St. Paul, MN 55114
(651) 645-2948
www.namihelps.org

Rainbow Health Minnesota
Rainbow Health provides comprehensive health services for LGBTQ+ people, people living with HIV, and folks from underserved communities.
2700 Territorial Rd. W.
St. Paul, MN 55114
General: (612) 341-2060
MN AIDSLine: (612) 373-2437
www.rainbowhealth.org

Red Door Clinic
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525 Portland Ave., 4th Fl.
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(612) 543-5555
reddoor@hennepin.us
www.reddoorclinic.org

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Minneapolis, MN 55455
(612) 625-3500
www.radiok.org

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Minnesota Historical Society
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mnhs.org

The Bakken Museum
Exhibits and programs to inspire a passion for innovation through science, technology, and the humanities.
3537 Zenith Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 55418
(612) 926-3878
www.thebakken.org

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(612) 375-7600
www.walkerart.org

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www.ChanhassenDT.com

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Zephyr Theatre
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Stillwater, MN 55082
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www.plymouth.org

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www.ourcathedral.org

Westminster Presbyterian Church
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Minneapolis, MN 55403
(612) 332-3421
www.westminstermpls.org

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Lutheran Social Service of MN
Serving all Minnesotans with person-centered services that promote full and abundant lives.
lssmn.org | 612-642-5990 | 800-582-5260
Adoption & Foster Care | welcome@chlss.org
Behavioral Health | 612-879-5320Host Homes | hosthomes@lssmn.orgSupported Decision-Making | 888-806-6844
Therapeutic Foster Care | 612-751-9395

YOUTH

Face to Face
Supports youth ages 11-24 with healthcare, mental health services & basic needs services for youth experiencing homelessness.
1165 Arcade St.
St. Paul, MN 55106
(651) 772-5555
admin@face2face.org
www.face2face.org

The Bridge for Youth
Emergency shelter, crisis intervention, and resources for youth currently or at risk of experiencing homelessness.
1111 W. 22nd St.
Minneapolis, MN
(612) 377-8800 or text (612) 400-7233
www.bridgeforyouth.org

QUEERSPACE collective
Creating space for LGBTQ+ to feel safe and empowered to be their true selves through mentorship.
Minneapolis, MN
info@queerspacecollective.org
queerspacecollective.org

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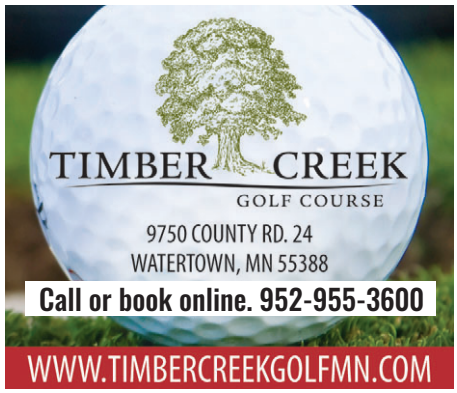

Acts of Kindness

BY ELLEN KRUG

Photo courtesy of Bigstock/photoguns

As we contemplate how the virus has so fundamentally changed things—and even resulted in cancellation of this month's Pride Festival—I want to share how several acts of kindness have helped me cope.

One of those kind acts even helped my company to survive.

I've had to pivot my business—training on human inclusivity—from standing in front of live audiences to sitting before a computer screen. It's required me, born so long ago, to become proficient in Zoom and other computer-based things. It hasn't been easy and the jury's still out on whether this new direction will work.

Still, I wouldn't be nearly as far on adapting to a new business reality if it wasn't for someone named Shelly Siegel, an educator with North Hennepin Community College. I met Shelly last year when I presented to a group of NHCC administrators, and she quickly became a big fan. In short order, her championing of my work had me talking to 600 educators at a conference in Omaha last November.

But Shelly didn't stop there. A couple of weeks into the lockdown, she called me.

"Ellie, I think you need to do a Zoom training for college-level educators; it needs to be about inclusivity and you as a transgender person. If you do that, I guarantee that at least eight people will sign-up. And make sure you charge what I think you're worth."

My immediate reaction: Are you crazy?

I explained to Shelly that I had no such training in my inventory. On top of that, "Zoom is foreign to me," I said. "I barely know how to log on as a user."

Her response: "I know you can do this, and I'll help in whatever way I can."

That conversation launched a month's worth of designing, advertising, and prepping for a brand-new 150-minute training, "Overcoming 'Othering': Radical Inclusion and Authenticity." Moreover, just as Shelly promised, she delivered eight attendees, along with another fifty-some people she helped recruit.

I'm happy to report that because of Shelly, I launched my first Zoom-based training to very good reviews and much needed revenue.

How can one ever say they're grateful enough for something like what Shelly did?

A second act of kindness came when I was set to do another Zoom event, this one involving "feminist writers" courtesy of The Loft Literary Center. Somehow, I had been selected to be on a panel with three other women-writers, all incredibly accomplished as reflected by awards and accolades.

As Glenda Reed, the organizer of the panel prepared for the event, she asked for my bio. Now, I'm not big on touting one's pedigree, so I sent along three sentences that basically laid out my story as a transwoman and author.

A couple days later, Glenda emailed with her concern that my bio wasn't beefy enough in comparison to the biographies of the other three panelists. I wrote back with an additional factoid and left it at that.

On the day before the event, Glenda again emailed. She explained that no, there still wasn't parity between my bio and those of the others, so she took the initiative to research me. "Ellie, I found this additional information about you. Is it okay to include it when I introduce you?"

Huh? I couldn't believe anyone would go to so much trouble to ensure that I—a total stranger—wouldn't feel lessened.

Wow!

One last story of kindness: I have an inclusivity-focused newsletter, *The Ripple*, that goes out to nearly 9,500 people every month. A couple weeks ago (relative to me drafting this column), I received a notecard that on its front had geometric shapes and sparkles; on the reverse side, the artist/author explained they were a newsletter recipient and were stuck at home with kids. As part of their activities, the notecard writer and their children were "(S)ending good ol' fashioned snail mail as a way to spread cheer…"

The notecard wasn't signed and to this day, I have no idea of the sender's identity.

A week later, the same person sent me an unsigned greeting card adorned with bees and flowers. The card read, "Everything Will Bee Okay."

Anonymous or not, whoever sent these mailings has lifted my spirits. Thank you, whomever you are!

Each of these acts of kindness has really made a difference in a time that's been incredibly difficult, especially given that I live alone.

I sometimes wonder if my work to make the world better even matters—if me being on this planet makes any difference at all. For some reason, the damn virus and attendant isolation have made me wonder about this even more.

Three people—three allies in the own ways—have answered those questions with a resounding, "Yes, you and your work do matter, Ellie."

I have to say, that's just quite wonderful. ∎

Ellen (Ellie) Krug, the author of Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change, speaks and trains on diversity and inclusion topics; visit www.elliekrug.com where you can also sign-up for her monthly e-newsletter, The Ripple. She welcomes your comments at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com.

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